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Healthy and Sustainable Diets: Consumer Poll

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Executive Summary

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Background and methodology

This publication provides an executive summary of a recent consumer poll on healthy and sustainable diets. In August 2021, the FSA, commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct an online survey in order to understand consumer behaviours and attitudes in relation to healthy and sustainable diets. The key research questions were:

- Do consumers consider their diet to be a) healthy/unhealthy and b) environmentally sustainable/unsustainable?
- Do consumers have a desire to change the healthiness, or sustainability of their diet?
- What are the key barriers for consumers to a healthier, or more sustainable diet?
- What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic had on the health and/or sustainability of consumer diets?
- Who do consumers think should be responsible for improving the healthiness and/or sustainability of diets in the UK?

The survey was conducted with 1,916 adults aged 16-75, living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Data was collected between 13th -14th August 2021 via Ipsos MORI's online omnibus. The data was weighted to be representative of the adult population aged 16 – 75 living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland on key demographics: age, gender, working status and social grade. The full dataset, including demographic breakdowns, is available via the FSA data catalogue.

This executive summary report only comments on key findings from the survey. Further information, including more detailed demographic analysis is published alongside this report in data tables.

Note on interpreting the data

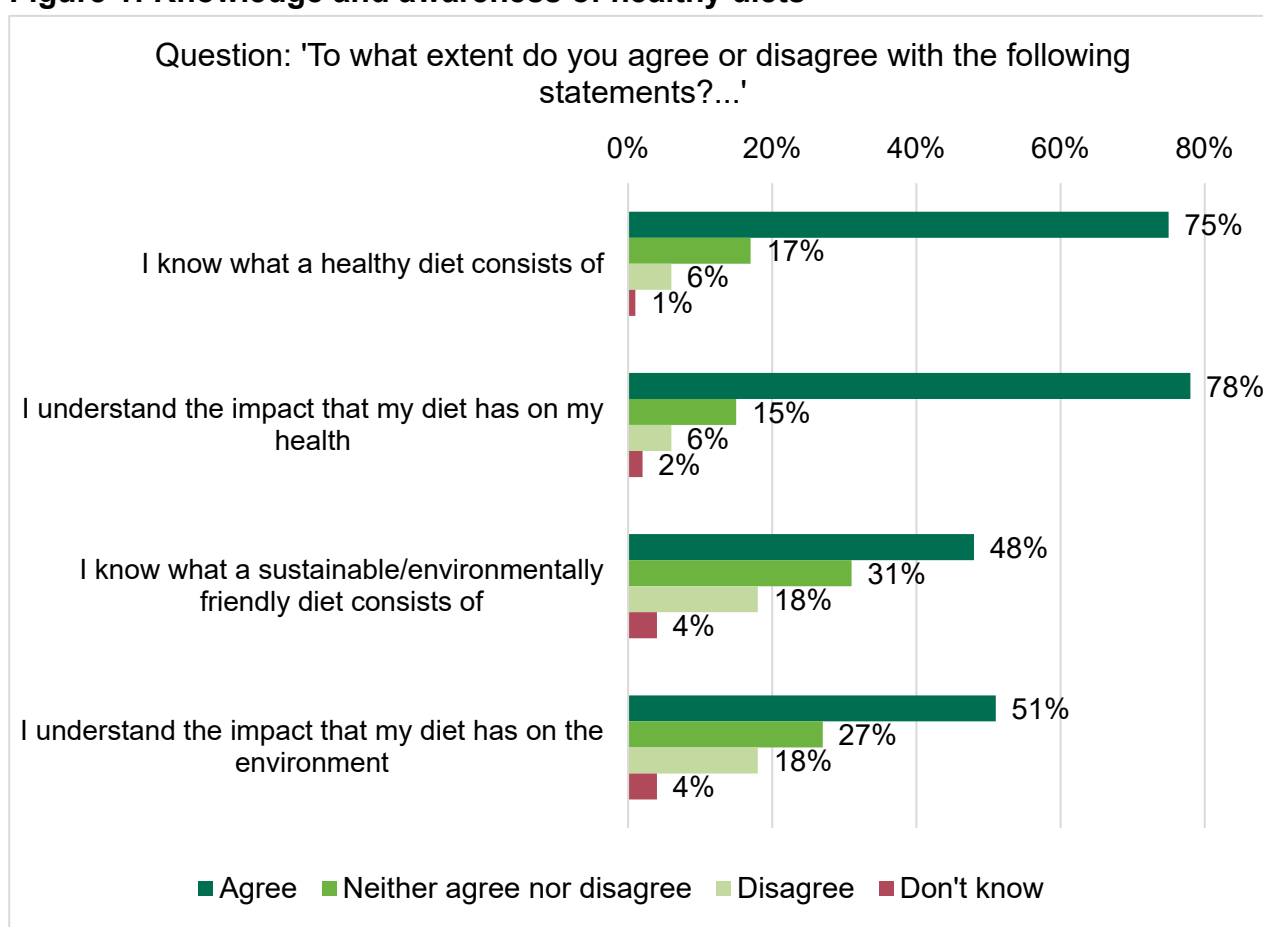
Results should be interpreted with care. All surveys are subject to a range of potential sources of error including sample imbalances which are not easily identified and corrected through weighting. Surveys are also subject to errors in respondents' interpretation of survey questions and response options. The data reported within this report relies on respondents' self-reported behaviours. Errors could occur due to imperfect recollection, or respondents' tendency to overreport behaviours which are perceived as being desirable and underreport undesirable behaviours.

Executive summary

Knowledge and awareness of healthy and sustainable diets

Most participants agreed with the statement 'I know what a healthy diet consists of' (75%), and 78% agreed that they understand the impact that their diet has on their health (78%). Just under half of participants agreed with the statement 'I know what a sustainable/environmentally friendly diet consists of' (48%), and 51% agreed that they understand the impact their diet has on the environment (Figure 1).

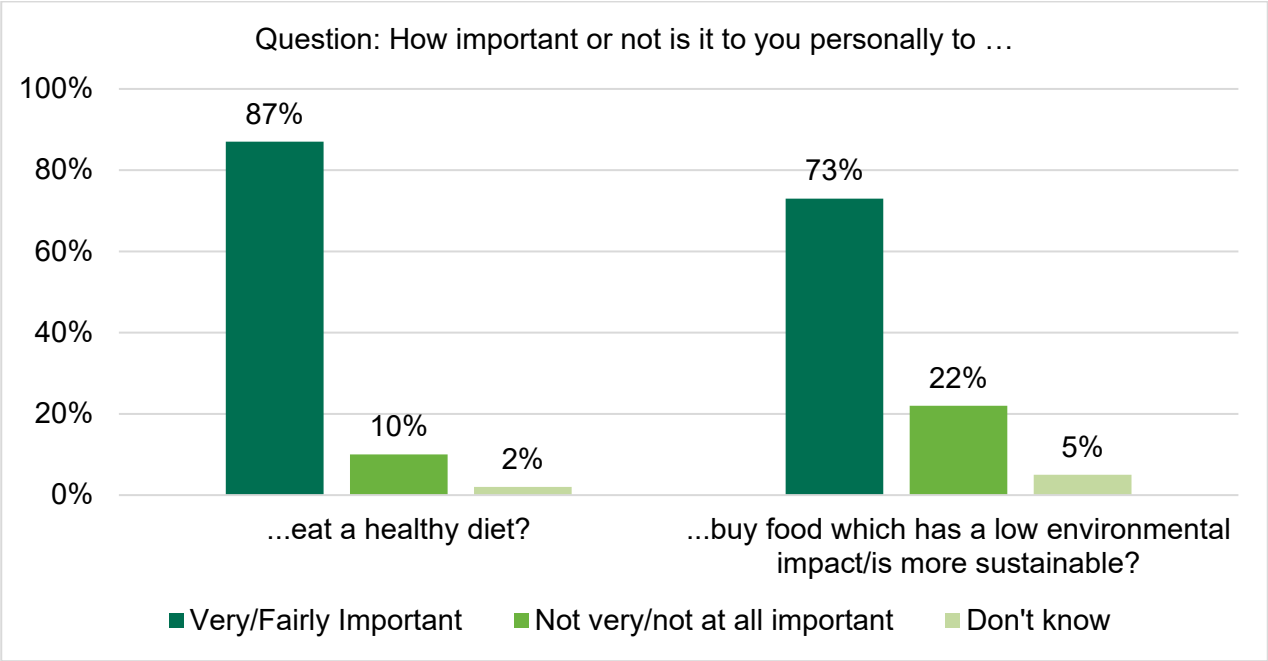
Figure 1: Knowledge and awareness of healthy diets



Base: 1,916 Online, adults 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 13-14th August 2021

Most participants (87%) reported it was 'very' or 'fairly' important to them to eat a healthy diet. Slightly less, but still a large majority of participants (73%) reported it was 'very' or 'fairly' important to them to buy food that is more sustainable/has a low environmental impact (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Importance of eating a healthy diet and purchasing sustainable foods

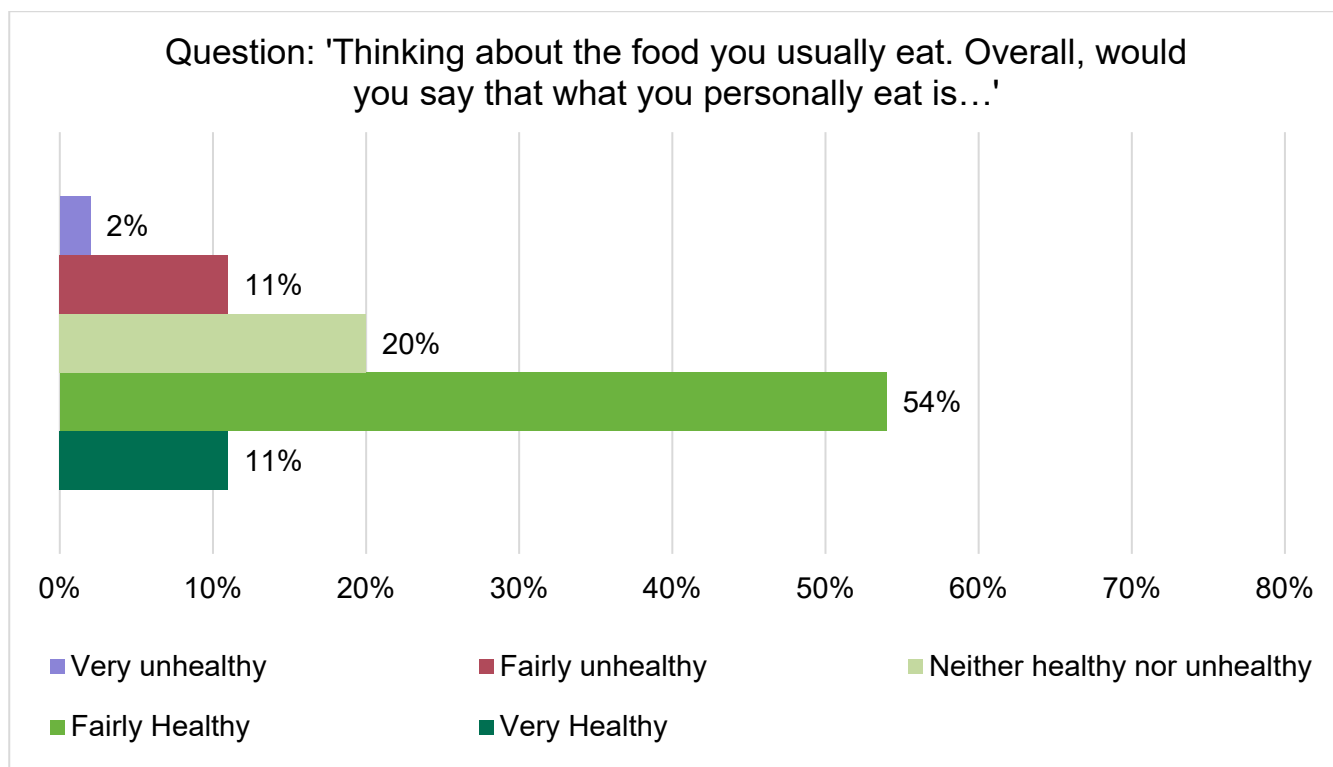


Base: 1,916 Online, adults 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 13-14th August 2021

Consumer perceptions of personal diet

The majority (65%) of participants reported that the food they usually eat is 'healthy'; including 54% who reported their usual diet as 'fairly healthy' and 11% who reported their diet to be 'very healthy'. Thirteen percent of participants reported that the food they usually eat is 'unhealthy'; among these only 2% reported their usual diet to be 'very unhealthy' (Figure 3).

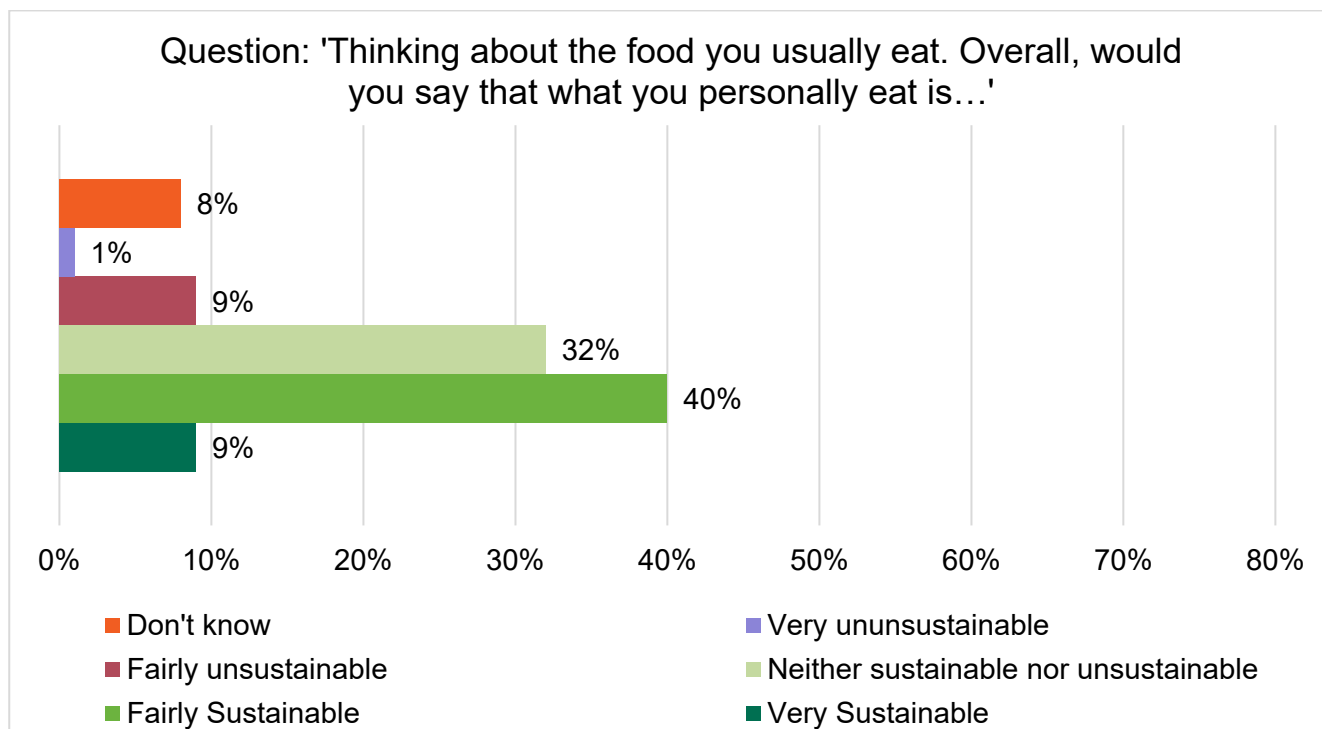
Figure 3: Healthiness of personal diet



Base: 1,916 Online, adults 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 13-14th August 2021.
Values may not add to 100% as 'don't know' and 'prefer not to say' responses not shown (each representing 1% or less).

Just less than half of participants (49%) reported that their personal diet was environmentally sustainable; including 9% who considered their diet to be 'very sustainable'. Only 10% of participants considered their diet to be unsustainable, and a further 32% reported it was neither sustainable nor unsustainable. Eight percent of participants said they 'don't know' if their diet is environmentally sustainable (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Sustainability of personal diet

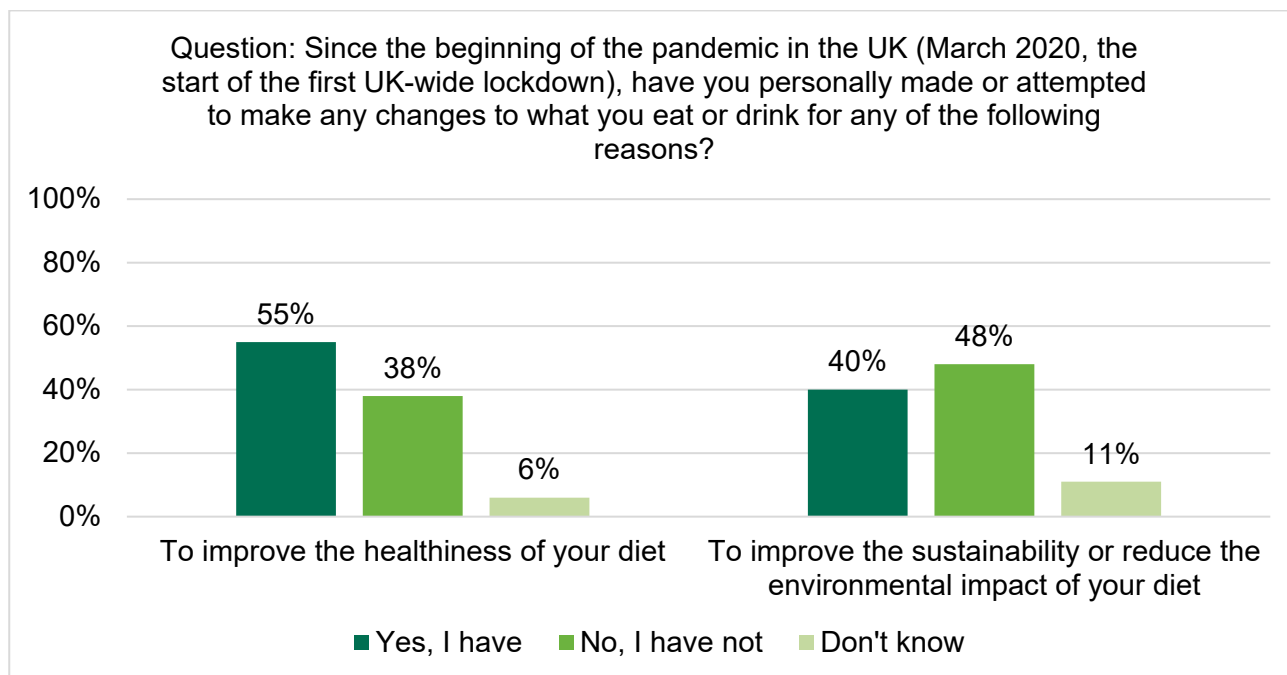


Base: 1,916 Online, adults 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 13-14th August 2021.
Values may not add to 100% as 'prefer not to say' responses not shown.

Changes to personal diet

Over half (55%) of participants reported that they had made, or attempted to make, a change to their diet for health reasons (to improve the healthiness of their diet) since the beginning of the pandemic in the UK (March 2020). Whilst 40% of participants reported that they had made, or attempted to make, a change to their diet for environmental reasons (to improve the sustainability or reduce the environmental impact of their diet) over the same period (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Have made, or attempted to make changes to diet



Base: 1,916 Online, adults 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 13-14th August 2021.
Values may not add to 100% as 'prefer not to say' responses not shown.

When prompted with a list of possible changes, 80% of participants reported making at least one change to their diet for health reasons (to improve the healthiness of their diet) since the beginning of the pandemic in the UK (March 2020). The most common changes reported by participants, when prompted, were:

- Eat more fruit and/or vegetables (40%)
- Eating less processed foods (33%)
- Eating fewer takeaways (29%)

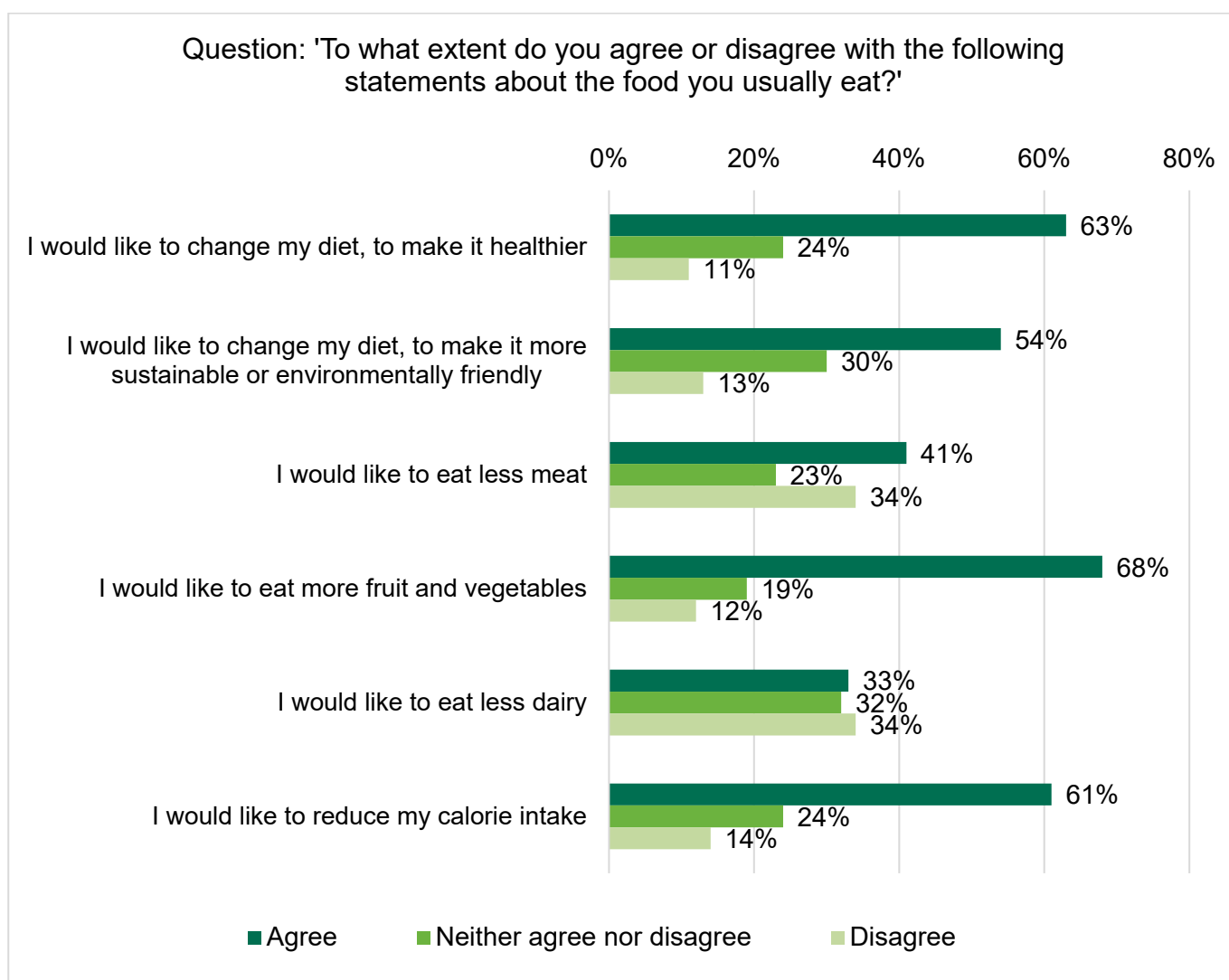
When prompted with a list of possible changes, 73% of participants could identify at least one change to their diet for sustainability reasons (to make their diet more sustainable or environmentally friendly) since the beginning of the pandemic in the UK (March 2020). The most common changes chosen by participants, when prompted, were:

- Reduced my food waste (34%)
- Eat more fruit and/or vegetables (27%)
- Eat less meat (23%)

Desire to change

Participants were asked about their desire to change their diet. The majority (63%) agreed that they would like to change their diet to make it healthier, whilst 54% agreed that they would like to change their diet to make it more sustainable/environmentally friendly. When asked about specific dietary changes, 68% agreed that they would like to eat more fruit and vegetables and 61% wanted to reduce their calorie intake. Two in five (41%) participants agreed that they would like to eat less meat, and 33% of participants agreed that they would like to eat less dairy (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Desire to change personal diet



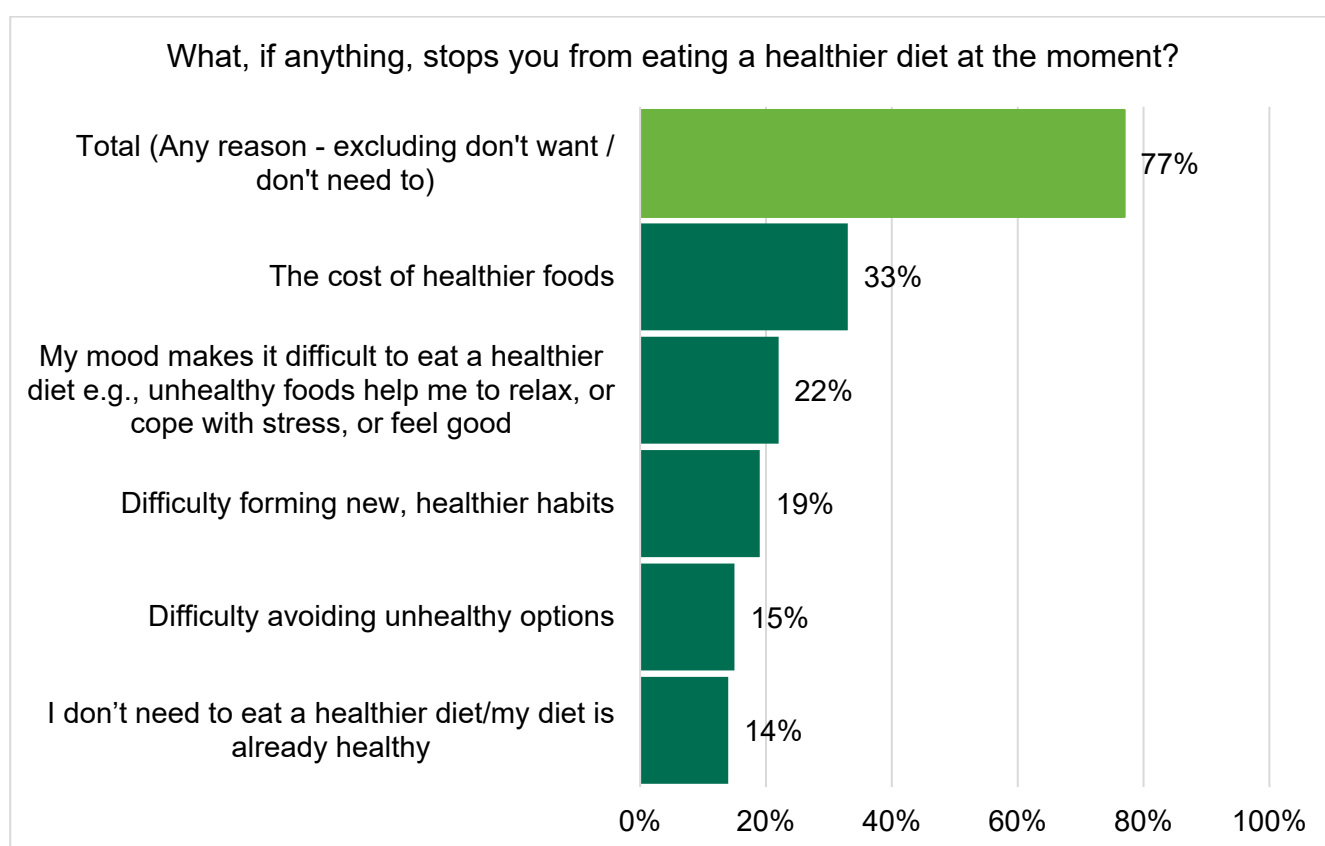
Base: 1,916 Online, adults 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 13-14th August 2021.
Values may not add to 100% as 'don't know' responses not shown.

Barriers to change

When prompted, 77% of participants could identify at least one barrier that stopped them from eating a healthier diet, whilst 14% of participants reported they didn't need to eat a healthier diet/their diet was already healthy (Figure 7). The most common barriers when prompted with a list were:

- The cost of healthier foods (33%)
- My mood makes it difficult to eat a healthier diet e.g., unhealthy foods help me to relax, or cope with stress, or feel good (22%)
- Difficulty forming new, healthier habits (19%)

Figure 7: Reasons for not eating a healthier diet (Top 5 prompted reasons shown)



Base: 1,916 Online, adults 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 13-14th August 2021.
Values may not add to 100% as respondents could choose multiple answers.

When prompted, 71% of participants could identify at least one barrier that stops them from eating a sustainable and environmentally friendly diet 'at the moment' whilst 9% of participants reported that they didn't need to eat a more sustainable diet/their diet was already sustainable (Figure 8). The most common barriers when prompted with a list were:

- The cost of sustainable foods (29%)

- Not understanding what is sustainable, and what is less sustainable (16%)
- Don't know (14%)
- Choices for sustainable options are too limited (13%)
- Difficulty forming new, sustainable habits (13%)

Figure 8: Reasons for not eating a sustainable and environmentally friendly diet (Top 5 prompted reasons shown)

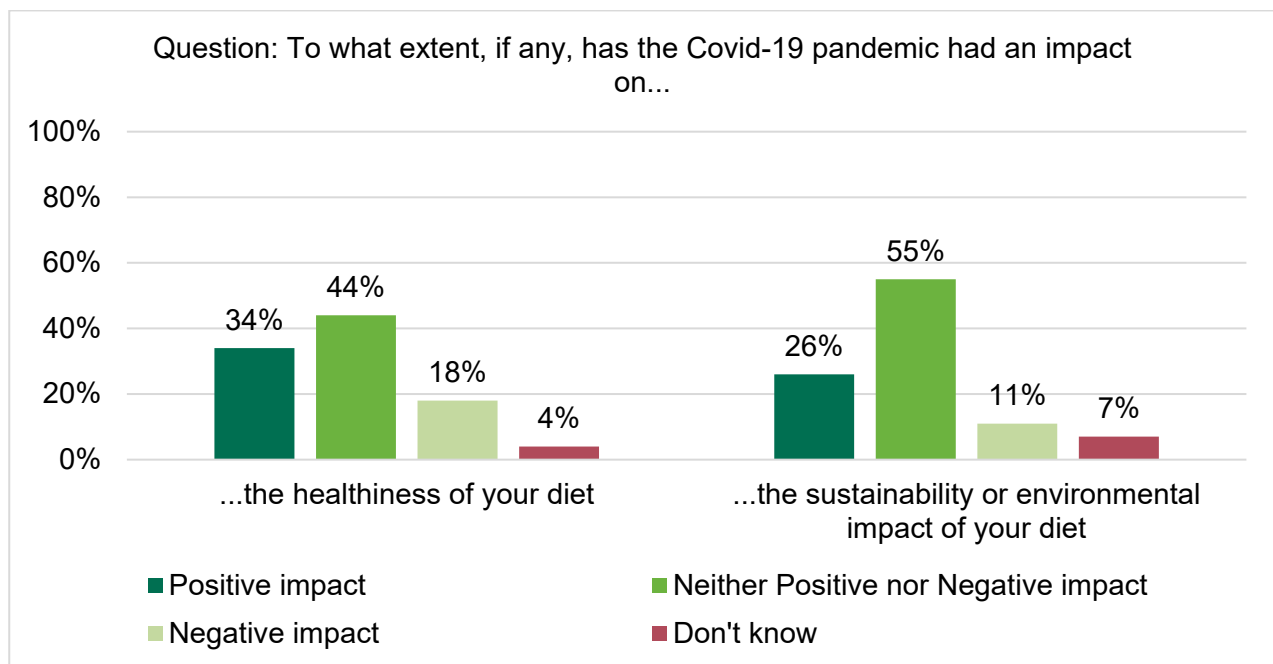


Base: 1,916 Online, adults 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 13-14th August 2021.
Values may not add to 100% as respondents could choose multiple answers.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on personal diets

Most participants reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had neither a positive nor negative impact on the healthiness of their diet (44%) or the sustainability/environmental impact of their diet (55%). A sizeable proportion reported that the pandemic had a positive impact on the health of their diet (34%) and the sustainability/environmental impact of their diet (26%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on personal diet

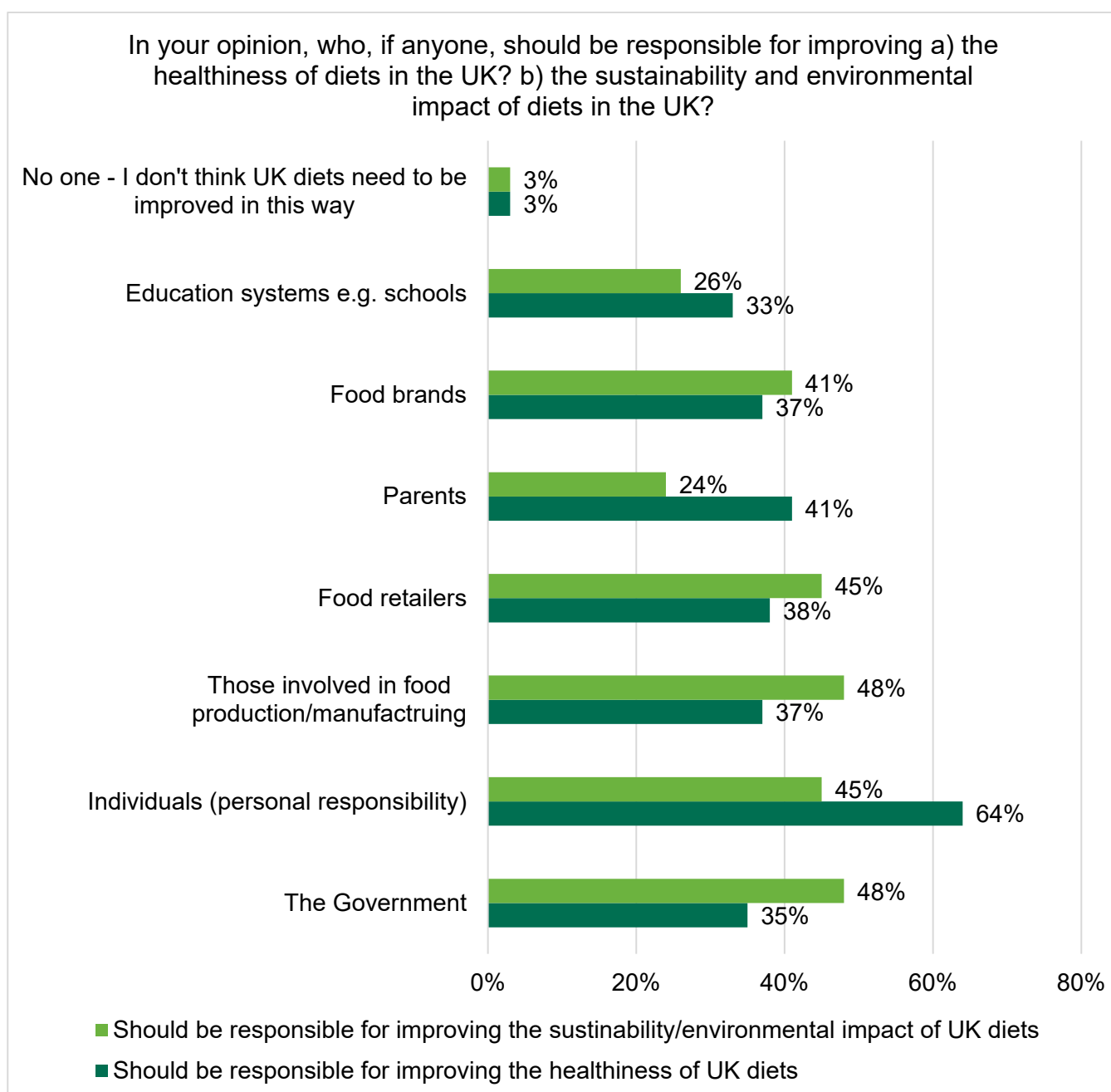


Base: 1,916 Online, adults 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 13-14th August 2021.

Responsibility for change

During the survey, participants were asked who should be responsible for improving the healthiness of UK diets, and the environmental sustainability of UK diets (using prompted response options). Participants were most likely to report that 'individuals' should be responsible for improving the healthiness of UK diets (64%). However, participants were most likely to select 'The Government' (48%) and 'Those involved in food production or manufacturing' (48%) when asked who should be responsible for improving the environmental impact/sustainability of UK diets. The full list of responses is provided in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Participant views on responsibility for improving the healthiness and sustainability of UK diets



Base: 1,916 Online, adults 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 13-14th August 2021.
'Don't know', 'prefer not to say' and 'other' responses not shown. Values may not add to 100% as
respondents could choose multiple answers.

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